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DAKAR PLS PASS ODC, DAO, AND RAO

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TAGS: PREL GA SG

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: ARREST OF SENEGALESE CUSTOMS OFFICIALS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

ARREST OF SENEGALESE OFFICIALS

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¶1. (C) The local media have reported Gambian authorities' early February arrest and ongoing trial of five Senegalese customs officials, allegedly picked up in Gambian territorial waters. In recent conversation with Ambassador, the prominent Gambian attorney representing the Senegalese defendants, Antoumane Gaye, stated that the five officials, on board a small craft in pursuit of a fleeing smugglers' boat, had been confronted and escorted under arrest to Banjul's port by a Gambian Navy patrol boat.

A FLIMSY CASE

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¶2. (C) Gaye asserted that the GOTG's case was flimsy, maintaining that both international law and relevant bilateral agreements permitted the two country's officials to enter one another's territorial waters in "hot pursuit" of suspected criminals. He also scoffed at the GOTG's charging the Senegalese officials with illegally bringing firearms into the country, observing that as a matter of course such officials would be armed in pursuing suspected smugglers. Gaye said it likely that the GOTG had decided to go ahead with the officials' prosecution despite the flimsy grounds out of overblown national security concerns, but perhaps also as a sign of defiance toward "big brother" Senegal. He added that he was in direct contact with Senegalese officials in Dakar as well as the Senegalese Ambassador here over the case and spoke of growing frustration in Dakar over the GOTG's insistence on prosecuting the officials.

COMMENT

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¶3. (C) The GOTG's provocative action against the Senegalese officials, as described by Gaye, points up current strains in the Gambian/Senegalese relationship. The case also points up the extent of the GOTG's suspicions about potential Senegalese threats to Gambian national security. It remains to be seen how far the GOTG will go in pursuing its case -- and what form Dakar's reaction may take. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD